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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

Memorandum



THE SITUATION IN VIETNAM

Information as of 1600
26 October 1966

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HIGHLIGHTS

The Communists may have launched their "fall-winter" campaign in Quang Nam, Quang Tin, and Quang Ngai provinces. Former chief of State Phan Khac Suu has been elected chairman of the South Vietnamese Constituent Assembly.

I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam:
There was no significant contact reported between allied and Communist forces throughout South Vietnam on 26 October (Para. 1). Three battalions of US soldiers began Operation ADAMS in coastal Phu Yen Province on 25 October in an area where over 9,000 Communist troops are reportedly operating (Para. 2). Three battalions of the 101st Airborne Division concluded the successful security Operation SEWARD on 25 October in Phu Yen Province (Para. 3). The Viet Cong 9th Division may be planning to attack the Trai Bi Special Forces camp in Tay Ninh Province (Para. 4). Communist forces may have started their fall-winter campaign in southern I Corps (Paras. 5-7).

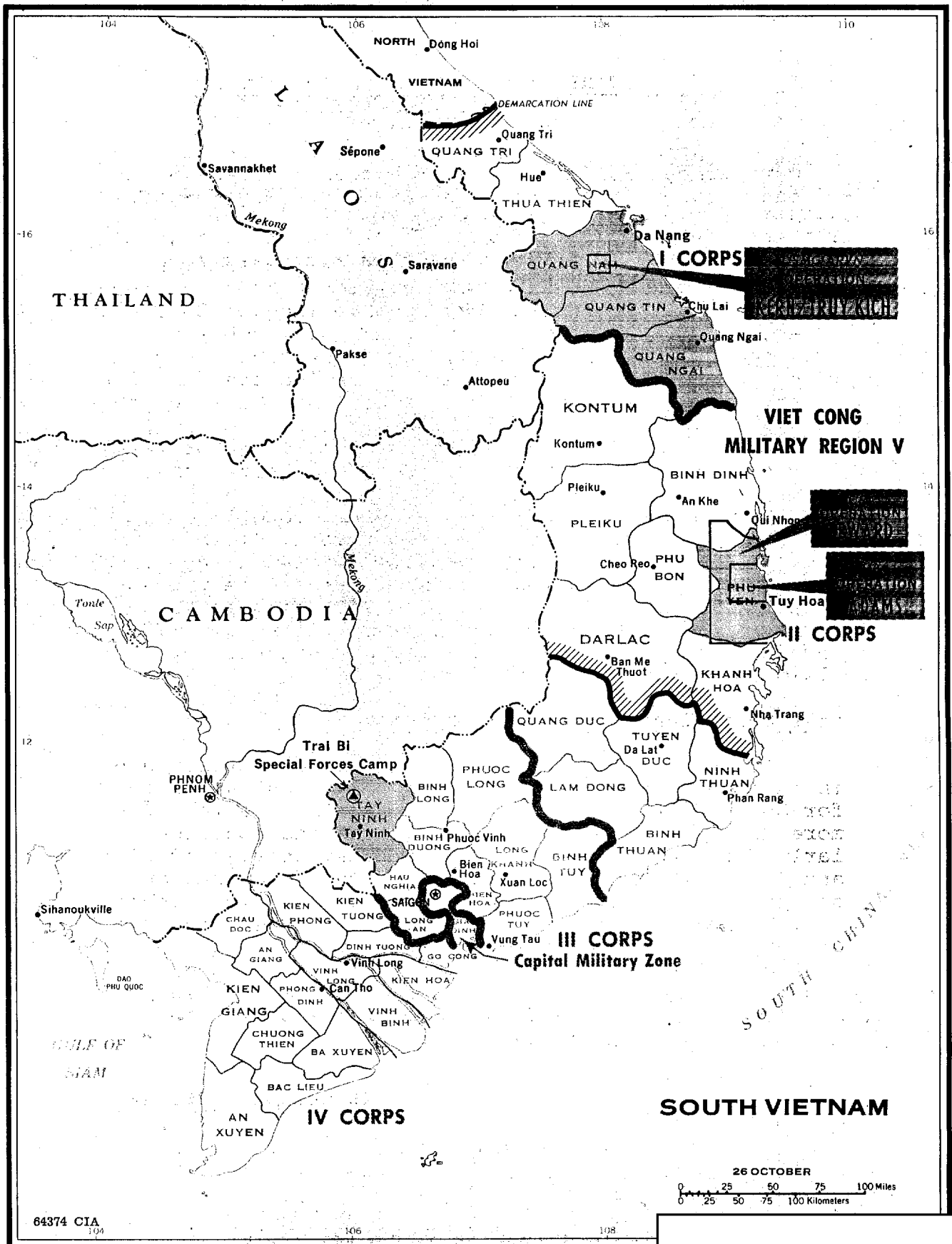
II. Political Developments in South Vietnam:
Moderate former chief of state Phan Khac Suu was elected permanent chairman of the Constituent Assembly on 26 October (Paras. 1-2). On his return to Saigon from Manila, Chief of State Thieu emphasized to newsmen the unity of the Manila Conference participants regarding a common peace policy, and outlined the necessary preconditions (Para. 3). The government has begun to release some of the political prisoners who have been held since the overthrow of the Diem regime in 1963 (Paras. 4-5).

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V. Communist Political Developments: Hanoi condemns Manila Conference communiqué (Para. 1).

VI. Other Major Aspects: Program of road construction in northwest North Vietnam is nearing completion, providing better access into this area from the Hanoi region and from China (Paras. 1-6).

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I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. There was no significant contact reported on 26 October between allied and Communist forces in the 22 battalion-size or larger operations being conducted by allied forces in South Vietnam.

2. Three battalions of the US 4th Infantry Division began a search-and-destroy/rice-harvest-protection operation in coastal Phu Yen Province on 25 October. This operation, named ADAMS, will sweep an area north of Tuy Hoa

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3. US security Operation SEWARD, conducted by three battalions of the US 101st Airborne Division ended on 25 October following seven weeks of successful operation in Phu Yen Province. Final enemy losses were 239 killed, 34 captured, and 880 Communist suspects apprehended; 27 Americans were killed and 173 wounded. A total of 315 tactical air strikes were flown in support of this operation.

Viet Cong Plans in Tay Ninh Province

4. A recently captured Viet Cong defector stated in an interrogation on 24 October that Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN) support units were having a more difficult time transporting supplies, particularly for Viet Cong combat operations, because of US and South Vietnamese air attacks. The defector,

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reported that the Viet Cong 9th Division had scheduled an operation for the latter part of October. The Trai Bi Special Forces camp is considered to be the probable target because this post has limited the movement of Communist supplies to areas near the Cambodian border.

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Communist Activity in Southern I Corps

5. The opening phases of the Viet Cong/NVA "Thu Dong," or fall-winter, campaign may have started in the I Corps provinces of Quang Nam, Quang Tin, and Quang Ngai. Since 14 October, Communist units have attacked five outposts, shelled two district headquarters, harassed refugee camps and bridges guarded by Regional Forces, and struck against a power plant and a dispensary.

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7. The initial momentum of the Communist campaign may have been temporarily disrupted by the highly successful US Marine/South Vietnamese Army spoiling operation which ended on 25 October some 25 miles southwest of Da Nang in Quang Nam Province. This week-long allied effort--named KERN/TRUY KICH--resulted in more than 400 Communists killed, as compared with friendly losses of 35 killed (8 US) and 120 wounded (26 US).

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II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. As was generally expected, moderate former chief of state Phan Khac Suu was elected permanent chairman of the Constituent Assembly on 26 October. A total of 16 deputies were nominated for the post, although five, including Phan Quang Dan and Dang Van Sung, withdrew prior to the balloting. According to the established procedure, each assembly delegate was allowed three votes to indicate his preferences among the nominees on the first ballot. The three nominees receiving the most votes on the first ballot were then voted on in a run-off, with Suu receiving an absolute majority of 61 votes. Ten candidates contested for the two vice chairmanships, with Le Quang Liem, a Hoa Hao leader, and Nguyen Van Dinh, a northern delegate from Saigon, chosen on the basis of a simple plurality. As yet, there have been no reports on the elections to two other important assembly posts--that of secretary general and that of chairman of the constitution drafting committee.

2. The election of Suu, a southerner, should satisfy the southerners in the assembly, and further will probably not disturb government leaders. Although Suu's election was not surprising, there were some interesting developments in the balloting for the chairmanship. A solid second to Suu in the run-off was Tran Dien, a Catholic member of the Dai Viet Nationalist Party from central Vietnam, who drew heavily from the Catholic deputies. Nguyen Ba Luong, a distant third in the run-off, apparently received many of his votes on the first ballot as a gesture of courtesy for his work as acting assembly chairman. Among those who did not make the run-off, Le Phuoc Sang, a Hoa Hao with possible government backing, and Tran Van Van, a radical exponent of southern regional views, did reasonably well on the first ballot. La Thanh Nghe, a wealthy Saigon businessman who was also rumored to be a government-sponsored candidate and was considered a prime contender prior to the election, finished near the bottom of the list of the 11 nominees on the first ballot.

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Ky and Thieu Return to Saigon

3. Premier Ky and Chief of State Thieu arrived in Saigon the afternoon of 26 October after accompanying President Johnson on a brief visit to Cam Ranh Bay. In a press conference in the capital, General Thieu emphasized that the Manila Conference has led to greater unity among the conference participants on a common policy for restoring peace in Vietnam. Thieu then cited as preconditions for peace the cessation of all aggression and terrorism, and the withdrawal of all North Vietnamese and hard core Viet Cong units, with suitable international guarantees. Thieu stated that once these conditions have been met, he would request the withdrawal of allied troops within six months. In response to questions, both Ky and Thieu made it clear that they would never recognize the National Liberation Front as an entity separate from Hanoi, or be willing to include it in a coalition government. Thieu also declared that future meetings along the lines of the Manila Conference would be held in Saigon at ambassadorial or ministerial levels, and also pledged increased government emphasis of the "Open Arms," or Viet Cong defector, program.

Government of Vietnam Releases Political Prisoners

4. On 25 October Minister of Justice Tran Minh Tiet confirmed the release of four officials of the Ngo Dinh Diem regime, who have been held without charge since 1963. The four officials are Ngo Trong Hieu, ex-civic action minister; Ha Nhu Chi, ex-National Assembly deputy; Huynh Van Lang, former director general of the Exchange Office; and Nguyen Xuan Khuong, former director general of land registration.

5. The release of these four followed an exchange of letters between Premier Ky and the head of the Catholic lay political group, Nguyen Gia Hien, in which Hien asked for clemency for those arrested after 1 November 1963. In addition, Chief of State Thieu will apparently issue a decree which will commute the sentences of a number of other political detainees on the occasion of National Day (1 November). These actions are in line with earlier government promises to Catholic groups which have been urging release of prisoners held without charge since 1963 because of their connections with the Diem regime.

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V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. Initial North Vietnamese commentary on the Manila Conference communiqué has been predictably harsh and in keeping with earlier DRV condemnations of the conference.

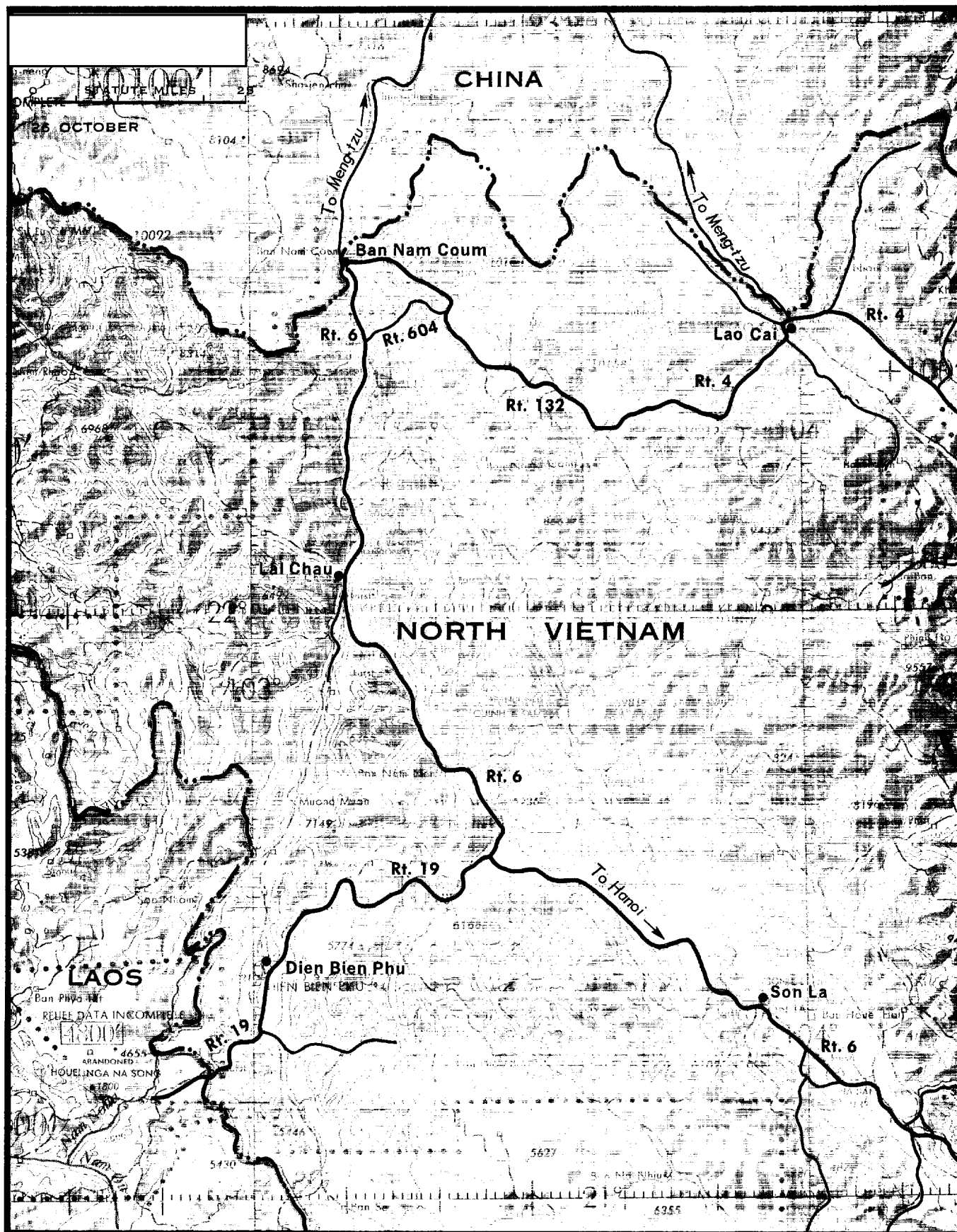
2. A Hanoi commentary broadcast to South Vietnam on 26 October claimed that the communiqué was a "carbon copy" of the one issued following the Honolulu Conference last February and, like that one, was "only a plot to enlarge the aggressive war in Vietnam behind the smoke screen of peace negotiations." The commentary claimed that the communiqué "falsely accused the Vietnamese people of aggression" and termed as "insolent" the proposal that "the Vietnamese people stop aggression." The communiqué's program for economic assistance and revolutionary development was also derided by the broadcast as being an attempt to "transfer the South into a US military base and new type colony of the US."

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VI. OTHER MAJOR ASPECTS

1. Road construction and improvement in northwest North Vietnam now nearing completion has significantly improved Chinese and North Vietnamese access to the Dien Bien Phu area and, through it, into northern Laos.

2. Route 6--the road from Hanoi to the northwest--has been improved, widened, and extended to connect with a Chinese road at Ban Nam Coum. In addition an east-west road has been constructed to link Route 6 with Lao Cai, which is served by road and railroad from China and Hanoi. In effect, there are now two routes from Hanoi to the northwest region, one entirely by road on Route 6 and the other by rail to Lao Cai and then by the east-west road to Route 6. From the Chinese side, traffic can now enter northwest North Vietnam by way of the Mengtzu - Ban Nam Coum road, the Meng-tzu - Lao Cai road, or the Kun-ming - Lao Cai railroad and thence by the east-west road to Route 6. Route 6 connects with Route 19 leading to Dien Bien Phu and beyond it to the Nam Ou River in northern Laos. This river is a navigable--although low capacity--route to the vicinity of Luang Prabang.

3. Construction and improvement of roads in the northwest dates back more than two years, well before US air attacks on North Vietnam began. Originally, the work progressed at a leisurely rate and apparently aimed only at providing additional road connections with China which were desirable for long-range strategic reasons. The pace of construction stepped up after the air attacks began, and it is likely that Chinese joined in the work. Nevertheless, construction has averaged only an estimated 0.1 mile per day since the air attacks began, compared, for example, with an average of 0.5 miles per day for construction of infiltration roads in the Laos panhandle.

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36 dispersed road-served storage facilities, camps with 538 buildings and cable bridges of the type seen in southern North Vietnam. These bridges are relatively immune to air attacks. Many of the storage sites are within the 30-mile air sanctuary zone extending south from the Chinese border.

5. The northwest region of North Vietnam is a secondary theater of operations in the North Vietnamese war effort and is not used for many deliveries of aid from China or transfer of substantial supplies for insurgents in Laos. No construction activity has yet been detected indicating extension of Route 19, which now extends through Dien Bien Phu to end just across the Laos border.

6. Although the improved road system in this area is relatively unimportant to the current Hanoi war effort, the logic of the layout of the roads indicates that they are designed with both Chinese and North Vietnamese long-range contingency planning in mind. Supplies could be stockpiled along the roads to support Chinese movements to Laos or a withdrawal of North Vietnamese into the northwest. In these situations, however, it would appear that many more than the 538 buildings noted so far would be needed.



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